

What's Stress?

Stress is an inevitable reality of everyday life. It's any kind of a change that we have to adapt. This change can be a negative experience like a physical wound, or can be a very positive experience like falling in love. Perception of an event/experience determines the effect of that event on your life.

Four possible sources of stress:

1. Your environment is full of events that you need to adapt: air pollution, traffic, noise, etc.
2. Social events may be stress sources: homework, presentations, and job interviews, loss of a loved one, expectations of your friends or family.
3. Physiological sources of stress: puberty, menopause, diseases, aging, accidents, malnutrition, sleep disorders.
4. Personal sources of stress: lack of self-esteem, perfectionism, academic failure, relational problems.

Richard Lazarus, a stress researcher, says that the stress begins when someone comments about an event/a situation. We, at first evaluate the severity and level of danger of a situation; and later evaluate whether we have necessary the resources to cope with it or not.

The anxious people usually believe that they don't have anything to do when a situation is dangerous, difficult, and painful.

Stress Reactions:

• Physical Reactions:

- Fast pulse
- Sweating
- Butterflies in the stomach
- Muscle tension
- Over-alertness
- Chest pains

• Emotional Reactions:

- Fear
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Becoming fussy or gloomy
- Constantly worried or frightened
- Restlessness, inability to concentrate

- Behavioral Reactions:

- Sleep problems
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Feeling tense and unable to relax
- Avoidance of social contact
- Restlessness

These reactions can be called “stress management reactions”.

Ineffective ways to cope with stress:

- denial
- alcohol and substance abuse
- aggressiveness
- avoidance behaviours
- projection

Effective ways to cope with stress:

- Techniques related to the body:

- ┆ Breathing exercises
- ┆ Relaxation techniques
- ┆ Take good care of your body: Exercise regularly, get enough sleep and have a balanced and healthy diet, keep away from smoking, alcohol and drugs.

- Techniques related to the thoughts and emotions:

- ┆ Try to see life like a “scientist” (look for evidence for each point of view without making generalizations out of only one event).
- ┆ Try to see the stress factors as opportunities to test your skills rather than threats
- ┆ Learn to test your irrational beliefs.
- ┆ Share your feelings with others, express them openly.
- ┆ Our decisions are based on our values and any conflict in them may result in stress. Think about your values and what’s important in life for you (success, health, family, friendship respect, independence, etc).

- Techniques related to the situation:

- ┆ Manage you time effectively: For this, determine your priorities and targets, plan what needs to be done urgently and what can wait.
- ┆ Develop you problem solving and communication skills.
- ┆ Share your problems with your friends.

Evaluate Your Own Stress Management Style

If you evaluate your own stress management behaviours, you can determine which ones are working and which are not so you can decide whether to change your behaviors or not.

- How do I usually act under pressure?
- How do I act when I'm frightened or I feel threatened?
- How do I act when I'm angry or frustrated?
- Do I need to try different coping techniques for my reactions to become more flexible?
- How do my stress reactions affect my relations with other people?
- How do my stress reactions affect my health?

References:

Cornell University Handbook (2010). *Recognizing and Responding to Students in Distress: A Faculty Handbook*.

Need Additional Help?

For further information, please e-mail KURES: kures@ku.edu.tr